



ARLEN SPECTER SPEAKS

ENSURING QUALITY CARE FOR VETERANS

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Retaining Social Security Benefits **3**

Meeting Challenges: Leaving No Child Behind **3**

A Reward for Farmers Who Protect Our Environment **4**

Recently, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony Principi issued the Department's decision to retain medical facilities in Pennsylvania, with no reduction in services.

The Capital Asset for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission report had initially recommended reduction in services in Erie, Altoona, Butler, and Pittsburgh. The final decision by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs reversed that decision, ensuring that Pennsylvania facilities will remain open.

The CARES program is a systematic planning process designed to prepare the Department of Veterans' Affairs to meet the future healthcare needs of U.S. veterans.

The proposal compared



"All Pennsylvania facilities will remain open"

Above: Senators Specter and Dole present Corporal John Zazvorsky of Camp Hill with a 50th Anniversary Korean War Pin.

the space, size, and locations of existing VA facilities with the number of projected en-

rollees and forecasts of their anticipated utilization of medical services.

On April 22, 2004, Secretary Principi traveled with me to Altoona, Erie and Pittsburgh. On those visits, Secretary Principi gave very encouraging remarks to veterans in those areas. In Erie, Secretary Principi informed veterans there that they would be pleased with the final decision.

In the final decision, the Erie VA Medical Center and the James E. Van Zandt Medical Center in Altoona will remain open with no reduction of services. In Butler, the decision was also favorable,

Continued on Page 2

REACHING AN ASBESTOS AGREEMENT

While the agreement has not yet been reached on the issue of asbestos litigation, all parties appear to concur that a lot of progress has been made.

In July of last year, the Senate Judiciary Committee reported out a bill on asbestos. The vote was supported largely along party-line votes

with one Democrat joining in the vote to send it out of committee. I supported the vote to send the bill to the floor, having stated a number of concerns I had on specific provisions.

During the August recess, I enlisted the aid of the former Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit,

Judge Edward R. Becker. For two days in Judge Becker's chambers, he and I met with representatives from the interested parties of the manufacturers, the insurers, the reinsurers, the AFL/CIO, and the trial lawyers, to start going through a wide range of issues. Since that time, we

Continued on Page 2

ENSURING QUALITY CARE FOR VETERANS (CONTINUED)

with negotiations taking place to build the new Butler Memorial Hospital on veterans grounds. I expect these negotiations will be successful and I anticipate that, as a result of these negotiations, expanded inpatient care of the highest quality, and the broadest range, will be made available to Butler-area veterans.

In Pittsburgh, there will be a \$100 million upgrade to current facilities. The assurances that have been given by the Veterans Administration that only after these new facilities—which will include new clinical, research, administration, and parking facilities—are put in place over the course of several years, will the VA further consider the closing of the Pittsburgh VA Highland Drive

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Campus.

The favorable decisions made by Secretary Principi stem, in great part, from the strong support shown for all of these facilities by the veterans who know them best, and the dedicated VA employees

who provide quality care to those veterans.

At a time when we are trying to encourage young men and women to enlist, putting them in harms way in Afghanistan and Iraq and around the globe, I am proud to see that we have maintained our promise to veterans.

Any cutback to veterans benefits would have been simply unconscionable, but now Pennsylvania veterans can be assured that the care they will receive will not only not be compromised, but actually improved.

SENATOR SPECTER MEETS WITH PENN STATE STUDENTS



State College, PA –Senator Specter answers students' questions at an open forum in the Hetzel Union Building at the Pennsylvania State University on April 14, 2004. The forum focused on issues facing Pennsylvania and the nation.

REACHING AN ASBESTOS AGREEMENT (CONTINUED)

have met on 18 occasions in my Washington, D.C. office.

During the course of these extensive discussions, we have come to significant agreements on streamlining the administrative process, early startup, defining the exigent health claims, moving through the language on judicial review, and dealing with the issue of medical monitoring. A good number of those provisions were inserted in a new bill introduced by Senator Hatch and Senator Frist on April 7, 2004.

There has been an overall view—clearly by the trial lawyers and the AFL-CIO—that there are many injured people who have suffered from mesothelioma, which is a deadly ailment, who are not being compensated because their companies were bankrupt. In excess of 70 companies have gone bankrupt under the pressure of asbestos claims. In total, there are hundreds of thousands of claims and numerous

parties who have been named as defendants. The specific statistics are that the number of claims is now over 600,000 and there are 8,500 companies which have been named as defendants.

The Supreme Court of the United States has held that someone is entitled to compensation for exposure to asbestos even though the injuries are not yet demonstrable; that even though the injuries are speculative, a jury may return a verdict based on what injuries may be sustained. That stands at the same time the people who have mesothelioma, which is a deadly disease, are not able to receive compensation.

It appears that we now have bipartisan determination in the Senate to grapple with the tough issues in this matter. I am optimistic that the Senate will be able to pass a bill which is fair to all parties involved.

MEETING CHALLENGES: LEAVING NO CHILD BEHIND

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is establishing standards in America's schools. However, my travels throughout Pennsylvania have indicated to me that there needs to be more flexibility on having students meet these standards.

The No Child Left Behind Act affects students in kindergarten through high school. The act emphasizes four main points in education, including increased accountability in schools, implementing programs that have scientifically proved effective, expanded parental options, and expanded local control and flexibility.

NCLB has to be implemented in a way which takes into account, for example, learning deficiencies that some of the students have—deficiencies in English and some students who are in special education. When you are dealing with children with limited English proficiency, you cannot expect them to meet the standards for others.



The Department of Education has provided some flexibility on what they call cognitive skills, which incorporates consideration of intellectual brain power. If the students simply do not have the capacity, then the Department of Education has recognized the

“My travels throughout Pennsylvania, however, have indicated to me that there needs to be more flexibility on having students meet the standards.”

need for flexibility. Deficiencies in English and deficiencies due to special education are of a similar nature.

I visited Lower Marion High School about two months ago and had a teacher very forcefully bring this to my attention. This type of reaction was not unfamiliar to me. When I read an article that 138 Southeastern Pennsylvania educators had raised real concerns about the difficulty of meeting those standards, I invited them down for a hearing on March 4, 2004. The Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, testified at the hearing and I wanted him to hear the educators' concerns.

My overall view is that the objectives in the bill are correct to provide accountability in testing and that it was a great accomplishment to bi-partisan support on this issue. In the future, I intend to have more hearings devoted specifically to these concerns on flexibility to determine what modifications are necessary to ensure the statute achieves its highest potential.

REFOCUSING OUR EFFORTS TO FIGHT TERRORISM

The nation owes a vote of thanks to CIA Director George Tenet for his devoted service in a very tough job for more than seven years, but with his resignation is a unique opportunity to refocus and reorganize the intelligence community.

The 9/11 Commission investigations have disclosed that had there been a unified command, and had all the facts been pooled together, 9/11 might well have been prevented.

Senator Lieberman and I au-

“[This] is a unique opportunity to refocus and reorganize the intelligence community.”

thored the Homeland Security Bill, which we introduced 30 days after 9/11. At that time, we tried to get in a provision, which we did not do but are

still making an effort to accomplish, that would position all of the national intelligence agencies under one national director.

With recent events being illustrative—Homeland

Security Secretary Tom Ridge on a

morning TV show saying there were no problems, and then later in the same day, Attorney General Ashcroft and FBI Director Mueller saying that the nation had to be on high alert for the summer—shows on its face the lack of coordination among the intelligence agencies.

Now with a new Director to be appointed for the CIA, this is a unique opportunity to focus on the absolute necessity to have a national director of intelligence so that we can pool all our information and do our up-most to prevent a reoccurrence of 9/11.



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A REWARD FOR FARMERS WHO PROTECT OUR ENVIRONMENT

On March 22, 2004, I was joined by U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman, Governor Ed Rendell, U.S. Representatives Tim Murphy and Melissa Hart, PA Secretary of Agriculture Dennis Wolff, local officials and about 200 Pennsylvania farmers at a signing ceremony in Hookestown, PA, to announce the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).

An offspring of the Conser-

vation Reserve Program (CRP), CREP is a voluntary program for agricultural landowners that creates unique 15 year state and federal partnerships allowing farmers to receive incentive payments for installing specific conservation practices.

Through the CREP, farmers can receive annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource conserving covers on eligible land.

Farmers will receive \$130 an acre each year to not farm near water. Alternatively, they can plant trees or let natural grass and vegetation grow to stop erosion and water pollution from fertilizer runoff.

In order to qualify for the program, farmers must express interest in the program and meet eligibility requirements. Interested farmers will be able to sign up for the program now through December, 2007.

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